The Coming of Age : An Anatomy of the Palestinian Intifada

Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi

Dateline West Bank Interpreting the Intifada

by Jim Lederman

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Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi, Ph.D.
Birzeit University
West Bank
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SUMMARY

The intifada is the mass-based popular uprising of the Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza in resistance to the twenty-one year old Israeli occupation. By rejecting the occupation and affirming their inalienable rights, the Palestinian are exposing the true nature of the Israeli occupation as the implementation of a ruthless policy of state terror; they are also simultaneously transforming Palestinian society through an active program of self Reliance and popular restructuring. The intifada, its achievements, premises, and objectives, must be understood and placed in the context of its urgent demand for a political solution based on the recognition of the Palestinian's right to self-determination and leading to the establishment of the independent Palestinian state.

As Palestinians under occupation, it is not only our right but our dutyto resist occupation and oppression. No self respecting nation in the world today can wrest respect or recognition from the world community if it does not actively seek to assert its own national integrity and freedom. It must be understood, furthermore, that all allusions to improving the «quality of life» of Palestinians under occupation are inherently unrealistic and in direct contradiction with the aspirations of the Palestinians and the objectives of the intifada. There can be no «quality» to life under occupation beyond the quality of resistance to occupation and rejection of all its manifestations including the unnatural reality of its premises of subjugation and its system of exploitation and inequity. The «quality» argument must be viewed in its correct light as another attempt at «sugar coating» the occupation for both public consumption (hence the contradictory terms «benign occupation») and for local consumption as a means of making an abhorrent situation of oppression palatable to the oppressed. Both rationalizations suffer from political as well as moral blindness and must be exposed as subversive when it comes to dealing with the essence of the problem which is the occupation itself.

In addition, the intifada has nullified and exposed all proposals of «autonomy» as a concession to the Palestinians under occupation. As shall be demonstrated, the Palestinians have already taken major steps towards creating their own autonomy through the intifada in spite of the occupation and as a result of a conscious effort of will aimed at creating alternative and indigenous structures to replace those imposed by the occupation. Viewed as such, the new infrastructure created by the intifada is statehood at its seminal stages established in direct defiance of the occupation and as a clear response to its patronizing tactical smokescreen of «autonomy». The operative word here remains «liberation» and it can never be partially or gradually implemented.

The third delusion which must be exposed is the arrogance and deception implicit in the «Jordanian option» argument. A basic premise of the intifada and a historical assertion of Palestinian everywhere has been consistently the recognition of Palestinianhood as nationhood. The Palestinians are neither an appendage to another state, nor are they so deficient as to require artificial adoption by more responsible and mature parties. And if the Jordanian connection (in its various forms) is viewed as a precondition to Palestinian statehood, then the mind really boggles at such preconceived notions pertaining to a state which is perceived as «infantile» and at the presumption of minutely drawing up its ties (and dependencies) even before its establishment. Independence is the essence of statehood and it cannot be compromised.

What is the intifada then, and what are its unique characteristics, achievements, objectives, and goals? To define the intifada in general terms, one can see it as a simultaneous active statement of rejection and affirmation : a total and unequivocal rejection of the Israeli occupation with all its implications, norms and realities; and as an affirmation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including its right to freedom, self-determination, and statehood. The intifada is the coming of age of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, a culmination of a gradual process of organisation and resistance which took the form of a spontaneous eruption - an upheaval that has shaken the very foundations of the occupation and brought into question all the complacent assumptions which underlay its short-sighted policies and expansionist dreams.

The uprising's truly democratic and revolutionary nature has been clearly demonstrated at every level and stage of its development, with a dynamic that is singularly appropriate to its perspective and objectives. Comprehensive and deep-rooted, it has emanated from the base as a genuine grass roots movement and has cut across all lines of distinction

such as region, sex, religion, and political/factional affiliation. It has forged a cohesiveness - both vertically and horizontally - uniting all classes and sectors of society in an active pursuit of clear objectives and goals. Its popular mass-struggle quality has succeeded in creating a two-way system of communication whereby the Unified National Leadership's role is not solely to lead to articulate the demands and different modes of struggle which are sought and are capable of being sustained by the masses. The effectiveness of the Leadership lies in its sensitivity and openness to the mood and needs of the population as a whole, in its being instrinsic as essentially popular and mass based, and in its being truly underground.

The intifada as an expression of the collective will has maintained a dual function/role in actively pursuing its objectives; the more visible and dramatic aspect is the external expression of rebellion in open clashes such as demonstrations stone-throwing, tire burning, sit-ins, and marches. These acts serve to attract the attention of Israel and the world to the Palestinians' total rejection of the occupation and are consciously carried out in overt defiance of its alien authority. They are the external manifestation of an internal reality, a visible expression of the violation of the Palestinian people's rights and lives; thus their message is one of urgency and disruption, of exposing the true nature of the occupation and the appropriate response to its «hidden» terror.

The second and less dramatic aspect of the uprising is the more enduring and significant process of restructuring society, at once severing the ties of inequality, dependence, and exploitation as imposed by Israeli occupation, while painstakingly and systematically creating alternative Palestinian structures based on authenticity and an effective reordering of priorities and life styles. Popular committee have started to assume some of the reponsibilities of national authority, aiming at organizing all areas of civil life and gradually replacing the «civil administration» authority of the occupation. More than 1,000 schools were closed down for a period of four months. (February-May) by the Israelis in an attempt at exerting futher pressures on the Palestinians through collective punishment and as part of a policy aimed at depriving them of their basic rights including the right to education. Neighborhood and popular committees set up alternative popular schools as a result of a collective, voluntary effort to neutralize such Israeli measures and to establish the counter authority of the people Popular committees are gradually setting up and consolidating an infrastructure to encompass te various facets of Palestinian life without succumbing to Israeli domination in a national program of self-reliance and self-help. Such committees, include in addition to education those of

medical relief, provisions and supplies, legal aid, security and guard duty, community work and agriculture. Committees are formed the larger coordinating committee which in turn establishes regional ties, and so on. Although the nature of their work is not overtly political, the political implications are enormous and must be given a significant weight in any future settlement. Thus both aspects of the intifada are essentially political in nature and in perspective and are a complementary force in the launching of a political offensive for an equitable solution. The intifada is a unique experience in the history of the struggle for national liberation in that it espouses the positive politics of restructuring and peace and eschews the negative politics of hatred and revenge.

The achievements of the intifada, in addition to those already mentioned, also carry tremendous weight in the transformation of the realities of the area, international politics. Primarily, the intifada has succeeded in demythologizing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by challenging misconceptions and distortions and dispelling the cloud of ignorance, racism, and prejudice which had engulfed the Palestinian problem; while Israel's success at the tactics of distraction and distortion had obscured the essential realities of the problem, it also created an unhealthy *albeit* comfortable (for Israel) international complicity which relegate the problem to a limbo of stasis and neglect, perhaps in the hope that it might eventually disappear or consume itself by sheer inertia and oversight. But the volcano lay dormant, although Israel and its allies had failed to read its rumblings, and the eruption has released waves of pent-up energy that cannot be suppressed. This eruption is the moment of truth which Israel and the world have to face and comprehend.

The myth of the «besieged» or «beleaguered» Israel as the perpetual victim has been negated by the reality of Israel's «besieging» of a captive, civilian population which it has succeeded in systematically victimizing for over two decades. «David and Goliath» has become a myth turned against itself. The «invincible» army has been exposed as a *rabble* of children beaters, bone breakers, and murderes of innocent civilians. When the soldiers buried four Palestinian boys alive, Israel buried with them the last vestiges of its claim to morality; when the guilty soldiers received reduced and minimal sentences, Israel sentenced to death its own system of justice; when Israel demolished houses in Beita and deported some of its inhabitants even before investigating the incident, it destroyed its credibility and brought to light the ugly truth of the occupation. By habitually punishing the victim, Israel's double system of victimization is paralleled only by its double system of values and justice. When nearly forty people, among them

2 nine-month-old babies and a three-year-old girl lose an eye each to a rubber bullet, it is Israel that loses its vision and insight. When the Palestinians are described as «grasshoppers by Shamir of «dogs» by Kahana, the dehumanization is self-inflicted by the Israeli when 30.000 Palestinians are subjected to arbitrary arrests and administrative detentions and then herded off to huge concentration camps in the desert, it is the aridity of Israeli «values» that is bare to world view; when more than 200 pregnant women miscarry as a result of lethal doses of teargas, it is Israel that dooms itself to a barren future; when Israeli soldiers break the bones of defenseless captive Palestinans or bludgeon thirn to death while simultaneously, playing the role of policeman, judge, and executioner, the brutalization is that of all humanity and its reverence for the rule of law; when people are expelled from their homes and houses are demolished, the exile and destruction are symbols of Israel's own loss of touch with reality and morality.

The myth of the «benign» occupation by a «democratic» Israel is exposed as an inherent contradiction in terms; for occupation in all its forms of physical and nonphysical violence is demonstrably malign, and democracy can never be selective in its application, nor can it survive its own subjugation and oppression of other in an escalating spiral of terror, Israel has provided the world with an open mode of systematic, deliberate, and cold blooded state terror, and has reversed the myth of the «terrorist Palestinians». The list of atrocities and reprisals against civilians is too long (and perhaps by now familiar) to recount, nor does it constitute a new policy hitherto unknown to the Palestinians. The significant difference is that Israel has been caught red handed and has been *seen* to commit acts which it had succeeded for twenty one years in covering up. A major «contribution» of the intifada (not without its heavy price has been the exposure of Israel as the one genuine practitioner and perpetrator of terror in the region. This «Brave new world» can no longer maintain its disquise.

The Palestinians, by openly defying and visibly resisting Israel's terror, are also engaged in passing ot the burden of knowledge to the rest of the world and to a major segment of Israeli society. Knowledge is a responsibility and a challenge which mus t be acted upon, for in the future no one should repeat the excuse «I just did not know». It is indeed a wonder how Israeli society and the world had success for so long in maintaining their ignorance and apathy with regard to the Palestine. The intifada is a message of urgency, with an austerity and purity of purpose, with a pristine clarity of vision, which no one can afford to ignore.

The fact that public opinion, and even official policy maker in the

international arena, have been forced to sit up and take notice, to put the Palestinian problem on their agenda as a priority, is a testimony to the success of the intifada in making its reality and demands a fact of world consciousness (if not conscience yet). It impact on the Israeli scene has led to futher political polarization, with a clearer delineation of position and a distinct swing to the right. Fascism has surfaced as an open and not so shameful policy in Israel, while the left has been unable to formulate a distinct and effective policy or line of action. The challenge of the intifada has been met with official brutality against the Palestinians on the one hand and officially sanctioned paranoia among the Israeli public on the other. Exploiting the safe coccoon of prejudice and preconceptions, Israeli leadership has launched a campaign of self-feeding generalizations and misconceptions with which to counter the truth of the intifada. Nevertheless, many Israelis have begun to question the truth of their own policies and practise, not primarily for their impact and effects on the Palestinian but mainly for their boomerang effect on their own policies and practise, not primarily for their impact and effects on the Palestinian but mainly for their boomerang effect on their own society-lest Israel's double system get merged of turn against itself. Self-interest has been translated into official, policy among several parties (center and some left) in favor fo «some change» for fear of

a) tainting the Jewish purity of Israel,
b) the back firing effect of violence and oppression on Israeli society itself,
c) losing the «classie military superiority and discipline of the Israeli army,
d) being exposed as victimizers rather than victims,
e) having to deal with totally undesirable options and solutions thus proposing a preemptive solution which is less undesirable. Ultimately, however, Israel is being forced to recognize the fact that it has to come to grips with the reality of its being (in fact and perception) an occupler whose control is totally rejected by the Palestinians; in forcing its hand to make the «unseen» occupation visible to itself and to others, the Palestinians have render Israel the service of making its confrontation with reality inevitable.

The most crucial and significant achievements of the intifada are those which bear directly on the Palestinians themselves. First is the forging of an actual Palestinian unity on the political level as well as on the social, economic, and popular levels. Political unity, in its mature and responsible practise, is neither unanimity nor imposed conformity, but rather a healthy coordination and interaction that is based on mutual respect leading to further progress. Cohesiveness and unity have allowed the Unified National Leadership to emerge from the ranks and to coordinate effectively such

a popular uprising, with a genuine understanding of its momentum and dimensions. By keeping in perspective primary objectives, the UNL, and the Palestinians as a whole, have refused to be distracted or diverted into side issues and conflicts thus ensuring the setting up an implementation of a program of action which successfully and directly addresses these objectives.

It can be said then that the Palestinians have utilized the cumulative experience of the history of their struggle, effectively avoiding pitfalls of the past (internal dissent and rivalry, inept or traditional undemocratic leadership, inability to mobilize the whole of society, dependence on outside factors and forces, etc.) and maximizing the potential inherent in a situation of mass struggle and popular commitment. This ability to grasp the imperatives and dynamics of Palestinian reality and to translate them into succesful, concrete steps of active resistance and restructuring is a significant landmark in the history of the struggel. Another qualitative change is the recognition and appropriate utilization of the various capabilities of all classes and sectors of society, thus achieving maximum involvement and mobilization. Self understanding is gradually raising the Palestinians to the level of healthy and responsible self-criticism as another outcome of the new self-confidence which the intifada has accomplished. All these facets of comprehension have led to increasing self-reliance, and afforded the Palesinians the opportunity to take the offensive and choose their own front and strategy.

Strategically, this offensive has been translated into a program of action whereby the Palestinians hold the initiative and the manner of confrontation. It is not enough to say that the intifada took the Israelis by surprise, for such a statement merely reflects on Israeli-blindness and inability to understand the reality of their own occupation and that of Palestinian aspirations. For the oppressed to hold the oppressor and deprives the latter of a major mainstay of its politics of manipulation. Exploiting this imbalance, the intifada has succeeded in putting the Israelis on the defensive and forcing their hand to reveal not only ineptitde but also the injustice and cruelty intrinsic to the occupation. While gaining the upper hand, the intifada has proceeded to diversify and expand its offensive by first defining limited and logical objectives, then consolidating these *achievements,* and gradually escalating. The escalation then takes on the quality of a new level and is sustained and ingrained to give further momentum to a new offensive. Total commercial strikes at the beginning signalled a state of defiance and class unity; gradually, these became partial strikes within announced time limits and gained the added dimension of establishing the authority of the UNL above that of the Israeli occupation.

At every stage, Israel entered into a direct confrontation with the UNL for control of the Palestinian street, and it lost each time. The same holds true for confrontations on taxes, education, economic, restrictions, sieges and isolation/starvation policies. Overt defiance has been used where appropriate, and establishing/channels and structures has proved successful where more permanent forms of resistance and endurance have been needed. Threading through all is the knowledge that the Palestinians have of «baptism by fire», of having confronted the monster and emerged victorious, of destruction of the barriers of fear, defensiveness, and isolatation.

Self knowledge has also been accompanied by an Awareness and understanding of Israeli society and tactics. While the occupation imposed a false and artificial proximity on both Palestinians and Israelis, each tended to maintain its distance and separateness. The Palestinians, however, have been subjected to the painful and und bidden knowledge which the oppressed acquire of the oppressor; and by virtue of the colonial nature of the occupation this knowledge has been brought home to the Palestinians to infiltrate every detail of their daily lives. Transforming knowledge into power, the Palestinians have been able to develop means of survival and resistance, gradually leading to the watershed of the uprising, without losing their national indentiy. The Israelis, on the other hand, may have utilized academic and abstract knowledge as an aid in the formulation of their repressive policies in the Occupied Territories, but like all other colonisers, they have failed to understand the humanity of their victims - racism and exploitation serving as distorting lenses. But ignorance has become a commodity that Israel can no longer afford, and the intifada has forced both the Israeli public and political forces to begin asking relevant questions although they have not yet arrived at the correct answers.

Most significantly, the intifada has added a new dynamic to the self-perceptions and relationship of the Palestinians under occupation and the Palestinians of the diaspora, and had has reinforced the legitimacy of PLO Leadership. Popular resistance is the *signe qua non* of Palestinian national integrity everywhere, and the rights of the Palestinians outside find expression in the endurance and struggle of the Palestinians on their own land. The PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians everywhere has been internalized and intrained as an essential truth of the intifada, and all attempts by Israel and others to create «alternative» leadership from the west Bank and Gaza have failed abysmally. There is no true or more genuine referendum for the PLO than the active and popular voice of the intifada endorsing its leadership. Basically, it is the

leadership, organization, and support of the PLO that has prepared the grounds for the intifada over the years, and the credibility of both is as indivisible as their unity of purpose and vision.

The undeniable core of this message everywehere is the Palestinians' right to self determination, including the right to choose their own representatives, the convening of international conference with full mandatory powers and with the participation of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and all the parties concerned, including the PLO on an equal footing to all other parties; the setting up of an independent Palestinian state, and safeguarding the diaspora Palestinians' right of return. Neither new, nor outrageous, these demands have been expressed in various forms and at different times but have rarely been heeded. By adding another dimension to that of verbal discours, the intifada seeks to make them visible and tangible.

But what is the strategy of the uprising, what are its more immediate demands, and how have they been translated into a political program? A close reading of the methods of the intifada and an analysis of the leaflets can provide the appropriate directions towards an answer. Without going into too much detail, one can summarize the program as follows

A - Premises and methods;

1. «normalizing» life under occupation is a falsification of its «abnormal» and totally unacceptable reality. Its violation of Palestinian rights and liberties must, be expressed in the disruption of all its systems and processes at the political, economic, and administrative levels. All aspects and details of daily life have to reflect the disruptive and abusive policy of the occupation and the total rejection of it by the Palestinians.
2. In any confrontation, the initiative is to remain with the Palestinians, while the tactic and timing must be varied. In any contest for authority and control of the street, the popular will of the Palestinians as expressed in the UNL leaflets has to continue to dominate.
3. Israel must not be allowed to profit from the occupation, but has to be made to pay a high price economically, morally, politically, and practically.
4. Dependence, of any type, on the occupation and its systems must be minimized while gradually building up separate, authentic systems and structures.

5. A new lifestyle has to emerge with adjusted priorities and geared toward the long-term continuation of the struggle. Home consumption reduced to essential needs only, while cottage industries partially filling the gap created by the boycott of Israeli products. Programs like that of «family symbiosis» lead to a sharing of resources which can absorb a great deal of the impact of Israel's economic siege and reprisals.
6. All existing instituions are to be fully utilized and adapted to pour into the collective effort of the intifada, while continuing with the creation of more appropriate grass roots organizations.
7. Armed struggle cannot be employed by the civilian Palestinian population under occupation by choice and for a variety of reasons.
8. The intifada must not become a *status quo* with which Israel can comfortable exist, consolidation of gains and qualitative escalation must operate as a driving force to increase momentum in the direction of the strategic goals of the Palestinians.
9. Political mobilisation and consciousness-raising have to proceed in conjuction with and emerging from the active involvement and organisation of society as a whole.
10. Palestinian political unity must be preserved and reinforced everywhere, and the oneness of the Palestinian people on their and in the diaspora must be stressed.

These premises are being implemented in a program of action involving a varient : of specific measures as part of the overall strategy of the basic Palestinian goal; but operating within the following political framework and demands.

B - Strategies and demands :

1. Refusal to deal with or give legitimacy to any Israeli appointed civil authority (police, revenue service, dept. of motor vehicles, etc.), specifically municipal councils and mayors, which have usurped the rights and responsibilities of an elected national authority. The resignation of such appointed individuals and bodies is an immediate and unequivocal public demand (which has been heeded by most appointees so far).
2. The rejection of all attempts at creating an «alternative» Palestinian leadership from the Occupied Territories and exposing them as attempts at undermining the unity and legitimate PLO leadership of the Palestinian people everywhere.

3. The qualitative transformation of the intifada into a full-fledged situation of civil disobedience (more accurately, civil insurrection/rebell).
4. Nullification of the emergency laws (Ottoman, British) and an immediate end to Israel's application of them.
5. The dismantling of Israeli detention camps and centers and the release of all Palestinian prisoners; in additon, to the cancellation of the Israeli program of intimidation and terror including the deployment of troops against civilians in populated areas.
6. The cessation of all Israeli measures aiming at creating new geopolitical and demographic facts in the Occupied Territories such as the confiscation of land, the erection of settlements, the usurpsion of resources, the deportation of Palestinians, and the demolition of houses.
7. Following the unmasking of the occupation, the demand for its immediate end, Israel having been proven totally unfit to remain in charge of a civilian population whose human rights it has constantly violated in direct defiance of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
8. Instituting free elections under the auspices of a neutral international body whereby the Palestinians in the West Band and Gaza may elect their own local civil authority.
9. Requesting international intervention in the form of an interim neutral caretakership of the West Bank and Gaza (whether UN or EEC or other) to safeguard Palestinian rights and to prevent Israel from creating further «facts» and demographic reality of the area.
10. Through such a temporary caretakership, enabling the Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza to practise their rights including freedom of expression of political organization, and free access to and contacts with Palestinian everywhere mainly with their legitimate PLO leadership. All this is in preparation for the convening of the UN sponsored international conference on the way to the establishment of the sovereign Palestinian state.
11. The launching of a concerted Palestinian peace offensive, clearly expounding political strategy, objectives, and commitments.

On June 16, 1988, the PLO launched its peace initiative as outlined in a document submitted to the American State Depertment by the PLo

spokesperson Bassam Abu Shareef. The initiative calls for an internationally suprervised referendum in the West Bank and Gaza to enable the Palestinians there to choose their representatives; should the referendum result in lack of support for the PLO, it is willing to step down in favor of the chosen representatives. The document also calls for direct negotiations with Israel on the basis of a two state solution. Israel's response in the occupied Territories on June 16 and 17 was expressed in raids on several Palestinian villages, the demolition and sealing off of 24 houses, the killing of yet two more Palestinians by gunfire and the wounding of 21 othirs. In a typically stubborn and unimaginative response, the likud re-ite' ted its by-now defunct Camp David accords stance, while labor hid behinc 's hackneyed Jordanian option. Such blind persistence in Israel's pursuit f its mirage politics is indicative of an alarming and dangerous self description.

With all the preceding in mind, an necessary word of caution has to be stated in order to prevent international inertia, and to place matters in their proper perspective. An awareness of the limitations and pitfalls of the situation is crucial to a genuine understanding of the urgncy with which the intifada is addressing the world. First, while a process of disengagement is taking place, there is no way in which the occupied Palestinians can totally establish their separateness from the Israeli occupation with its military, economic and physical domination of the area. Second, despite the tremendous success of the popular committees and the Palestinian alternative structures, no nation can be totally self-sufficient and no people can fully establish the mechanisms of statehood without the political apparatus of the state itself. Third , independence has never been a gradual process, and in the experience of all colonized peoples, liberation and independence are the result of a political decision taken in the maturity of the people's struggle and the external recognition of their rights. Fourth, no nation has been called upon or expected to set up its state under occupation by a sheer international act of will nor to provide guarantees on the viability of this state of its future policies; the Palestinian struggle now must be seen as the inevitable prelude to a solution based on the Palestinians right to self-determination and leading to a legitimate international political decision to establish the independent Palestinian state.

Overloading the intifada with expectations beyond its abilities and control is unrealistic and unjust. The Palestinians' ability to resist and endure is immense, but Israel's horrific capacity for inflicting violence and terror is boundless. To do the intifada justice, the world community has

to intervene actively to complete the process of disengagement (by ending the occupation) and restructuring (by setting up the state). We do not seek memorials for the dead, nor do we relish the prospect of a future collective recognition of guilt by an apathetic world; the political decision has to be made now. The Palestinian must not be betrayed once more by a conspiracy of denial, silence, and inaction; they must not be made once again to bear the burden of knowledge alone; they must not continue to pay heavy price for the duplicity and blindness of others.

In conclusion, clearly the path to Palestinian statehood is long and arduous, and just as clearly the Palestinians have embarked on a journey with this end in sight. The launching of an active political campaign in support of the convening of UN sponsored international confirmation of the Palestinian peace initiative is not only an urgent demand, but also a necessary and sufficient condition for a solution which can claim legitimacy and permanence. The intifada in the West Bank and Gaza is one aspect of the struggle, but it must be reinforced by a concerted local and international political effort to respond to its challenges and demands. The imperatives of the situation are applicable internationally, and not just regionally. No should Israel be left to its own devices to dictate its policies and create realities within its own expansionist and racist vision and endeavor. The Palestinians do not seek statehood from Israel, for they are now addressing correctly and appropriately the internationl body of nations which is the only authority capable of responding legitimately to this demand - the same body which adopted the 1947 Partition Plan and sanctioned the creation of the state of Israel.

The uprising is a means and not an end, and its achievements have been dearly paid for by the Palestinians. If the world fails to take up this opportunity and challenge, it will not only be betraying the Palestinians but also its own human and political integrity. This chance to rectify a historical injustice is rare indeed, one that no single nation or body of nations can afford to forfeit-Every Palestinian killed, or imprisoned, or deported, every house demolished, every tree uprooted is already one too many.

Dateline West Bank
Interpreting the Intifada

by Jim Lederman

More than just rage against 21 years of Israeli occupation; more even than an outburst of frustration at the inability of outsiders to resolve the Palestinian issue; the *intifada* — the Palestinian uprising in the Israeli — occupied territories — is an outward manifestation of a social revolution that has been under way on the West Bank an Gaza Strip for more than a decade. This revolution has been widely overlooked in analyses of the uprising. The very word *intifada* (Arabic for «to shake» or «to shake off») implies that the entire Palestinian body Politic - not just the youngsters in the streets has either willing or unwillingly become involved. The revolt is not just centrered in the politically aware urban areas and refugee camps but also extends into the small est and remotest villages. Thus the uprising has long-term implications for the future of the West Bank and Gaza and for the policies that will have to deal with this new reality.

In the past, the domestic Palestinian battle for social reform was expressed primarily in riots at universities between rival Palestinian factions and in competition for control of public-service and charitable organizations. The basic belief of the *intifada*'s rebels is that those in positions fo authority are either unwilling to deal or incapable of dealing with the issues of greatest concern to the young, the approcimately 70 per cent of Palestinians in the occupied territories who are under age 24. This rejection of traditional authority inevitably led to a confrontation with the center of power in the West Bank and Gaza — the Israeli army.

The young Palestinians perceive not only an inability to direct their own futures but also the ongoing breakdown of the most basic survival mechanisms used by their elders for at least two generations. Those

mutually supportive mechanisms, which combine advanced education and free movement with traditional social rights, the protection offered by extended families and clans, and norms of property holding and local leadership, once provided Palestinians with a workable social safety net. In recent years, however, this fine web has come apart.

This dissolution stems form a belief common to Israel, the Arab states, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that it was in each one's individual interests to control Palestinian actions in the occupied territories. To exert control, each group, for its own reasons, sought out and exploited points of political, military, and administrative leverage. The cumulative effect of this vulnerability was to lift the level of fear among young Palestinians to the point of despair, until they believed they had nothing to lose. The *intifada* was thus preordained.

None of the principal groups pushing on the Palestinians was seeking a large-scale social revolution. In fact, each wanted a measure of social stability to pursue its own aims. The Israelis wanted quiet and order. The Arab states wanted to avoid any reason for the Palestinians within their borders to become restive. The PLO feared that great instability in the occupied territories might lead to the creation of an indigenous leadership that could threaten the influence of the Palestinian expatriates who lead the organization. Using a combination of incentives, threats, and administrative controls, each group tried to prevent the Palestinian heads of families from openly rejecting the authority being imposed on them. What both the Israelis and the Arabs outside the territories failed to recognize was that the point of total despair, and the consequent move to open rebellion, could jump an entire generation. This is why the Israelis and the Arabs were caught completely bu surprise when the rioting broke out in December 1987.

The issues of fundamental concern to young Palestinians are numerous. One is education or, more precisely, what young Palestinians will be able to do once they have completed their studies. The trauma of the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced out of their homes, led many of them to believe that their only security lay in education. Houses, shops, and bank accounts could be lost in minutes. The only «property» that could not be taken away was that which resided in their brains.

With the school system developed in the early 1950s by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, education became available even to the poorest refugee. Those with at least a basic high school education reaped immediate rewards. From the late

1950s onward, King Hussein of Jordan undertook an intensive effort to develop the part of his realm east of the Jordan River, at the expense of the West Bank : Educated West Bank Palestinians — from plumbers to physics teachers — were sought after. From 1948 to 1966 an estimated 400,000 Palestinians left the West Bank, most goind to the East Bank. In the late 1960s and 1970s the job market in the Persian Gulf states also flourished, and an additional 147,000 Palestinians voluntarily immigrated there from 1967 to 1983.

Beginning in 1983, however, the situation changed dramatically. Falling oil prices led to economic retrenchment in the gulf states. Palestinians, who had always been viewed by the gulfs rulers as a potential source of political unrest, were less welcome than they had been in the past. Jordan, with the encouragement of the PLo, began imposing severe travel restrictions on young Palestinians — ostensibly to try to prevent them form emigrating. The PLO wanted to keep the young men at home for ideological reasons. The Jordanians, however, had other concerns. The cutbacks in payments from the Arab gulf states had slowed the Jordanian economy, and the Jordanians no longer needed so many West Bank workers. Further, Hussein had always viewed the young West Bankers as a potentially radicalizing force in his country. If he did not need them for his own purpose, he did not want them around.

Suddenly, it seemed to the Palestinians, education in itself no longer guaranteed a secure, well-paying job. While more than 2,500 Palestinians from the occupied territories were graduating from universities annually, only 400 new jobs requiring academic credentials were opening up on the West Bank each year. In Gaza, which is much more underdeveloped than the West Bank, the situation was worse.

The jobs that were available came largely in Israeli industry, construction, and services. Today about one-third of the West Bank labor force and more than one-half of Gaza wage earners work in Israel. Yet status-conscious, educated Palestinians were reluctant to take blue-collar jobs. Also, work in Israel no longer appeared to be as financially attractive as it once had been. In the economically buoyant years following the Six-Day War in 1967, in which Israel took control of the West Bank and Gaza and placed them under military administration, Palestinians could anticipate a striking increase in wages if they worked in Israel. From 1969 to 1972, for example, per capita income rose by 18 per cent per year for Gazans and by 14 per cent for West Bankers. But from 1981 to 1986, per capita income rose by an average of only 5 per cent annually in the West Bank and actually fell by an annual average of 6 per cent in Gaza.

Compounding the Palestinian bitterness and disappointment was the realization that the situation was not likely to get better and most likely would get worse. Israel consistently had restricted industrial development in the occupied territories out of fear that Palestinian-owned industries would compete with Israeli ones. As a result, industry as a proportion of the gross domestic product of the West Bank fell from 9 per cent to 6.7 per cent from 1968 to 1984. Only five enterprises employed more than 100 people. In addition, Jordan, by offering highly attractive terms for investment in places like the Irbid industrial park, was siphoning off most of the capital that might have been invested locally. Money available from the occupied territories development fund controlled jointly by Jordan and the PLO had been squeezed drastically because the Arab oil-producing states were no longer fulfilling their commitments to the fund. Jordan's July 28, 1988, decision to cancel its $1,3 billion development plan for the West Bank was a direct product of the cutbacks in contributions by these Arab states. In any case, most of the fund's money has been routinely handed out as home mortgages and has not been used to create job-producing enterprises.

The Seeds of Rebellion.

A reaction was inevitable. The first signs came in early 1987, long before the *intifada* broke out. Despite all the travel restrictions, net emigration from the occupied territories jumped from an average of fewer than 8.000 per year from 1983 to 1985 to a record 23.200 in 1986, according to Hisham Awartami, a prominent Palestinian and professor of economics at An-Najah Universtity. It is still unclear where these Palestinians went, but West Bankers believe that most left for Europe and North and South America. The Jordanians do allow young Palestinians to use their country as a transit point, so long as they have long-term entry visas to other countries.

The changing job market, however, cannot account for the breadth of the uprising. Other processes that had been under way for some time were finally showing their effects.

One was the impact of long-term emigration on the social balance in the occupied territories. Of those West Bank Palestinians who were between ages 10 and 21 when the Israeli occupation began in 1967, only 30 per cent of the men and 50 per cent of the women continue to live on the West Bank. In other words, the Palestinians under occupation have lost a very high percentage of people who by now would be easing into positions of leadership. So the body of financially independent people in their early

middle years - ages 31 to 42 - based in industry, in self-owned business, and in the professions is insufficient to provide a legitimate transitional generation community leaders. Instead, the vast majority of Palestinians in the occupied territories in this middle group are, because of their jobs, beholden to someone or some group. Some university lecturers, for example, depend on Jordan and the PLO for a significant par t of their funding. Wage earners working in Israel depend on their Jewish employers' good will. Civil servants are subject to the strictures of the army-run Israeli Civil Administration. Businessmen are at the mercy of both Israeli and Jordanian import and export controls.

The result was an abrupt shift in leadership — from the traditional heads of clans to the young stone throwers — that had a major influence on the course of the *intifada.* The youngsters hurling Molotov cocktails could capture world attention for months, but they were unable to do more than make headlines. Having rejected the traditional leaders, they lacked the political knowledge and experience to draft a coherent political agenda that could be presented to the public as a program for change.

Emigration also played a large part in drawing women into the *intifada.* In recent years the pattern of emigration has changed. In the past, Palestinians would leave home to seek their fortunes or education in the Arab world and then return home to marry. With the change in the job market and the advent of Jordanian travel restrictions, they began to travel further afield — to North and South America. Many Palestinian men, whether they returned home or not, found wives abroad, thus permanently upsetting the malefemale demographic balance on the West Bank. When combined with several other factors, this change undermined traditional women's rights and made women in their late 20s the single most vulnerable group on the West Bank.

Another factor was the continuing drive for education, which caused more Palestinian men to seek advanced degrees abroad and delay getting married. Meanwhile, the men pointed to the rising cost of housing as a reason for delaying marriage. While in the 1960s Palestinian men usually married by age 24 or 25, in the 1980s the upper age for marriage has risen to about 30.

After the right-wing Likud coalition came to power in Israel in 1977, the government increased its control over available land. In greatly overcrowded Gaza, more than 30 percent of the land now falls under Israeli control. On the West Bank, the figure has reached 52 per cent. This control is exercised through, among other methods, direct possession, confiscation, and the closing of land for malitary pourposes. Further, severe Israeli

restrictions prevent Arabs from building within 200 200 meters of a main or even planned road and limit building in such sensitive areas as Jerusalem's Arab suburbs. Thus prime land for building has quintupled in price in recent years to nearly $45,000 for a quarter-acre plot. Many of the refugees packed into crowded camps can no longer hope to escape their conditions by buying their way out, especially if they marry early.

When they decide that the time to marry is right, however, Palestinian men still seek brides in their early 20s. According to one study on marriage by Mohammed Sabboubeh, the director of research and training at the Israeli Civil Administration's Social Welfare Department on the West Bank, a Palestinian woman over age 26 has only approximately a 7 percent chance of getting married to a previously unmarried man.

What both the Israelis and the Arabs outside the territories failed to recognize was that the point of total despair, and the consequent move to open rebellion, could jump an entire generation.

These demographic and social changes have affected women in two basic ways. First, there now exists a group of bewildered and angry women in their late 20s who have lost all hope of getting married and of habing the protection marriage affords in Arab society. Second, because this democraphic inbalance gives men greater leverage over the marriage contract in premarital negotiations, and because of hte high cost of marriage, men are claiming that they cannot afford to pay the bride price. Among Moslems, a man who wanted to marry traditionally paid his betrothed a designated sum of money. The bride then used the money to pruchase gold jewelry as her primary source of financial security in the event of divorce or abandonment. Since no legal provision exists on the West Bank or Gaza for alimony or child support, a woman who agrees to the new terms gives up her most important type of independent financial protection. Many women have. Neither the Israelis nor the Jordanians, who in practice share responsiblity for the legal framework on the West Bank, have addressed this pressing social issue.

Many of these women turn to their families for help. But the degree of influence the families can bring to bear has diminished. Emigration of some of the «best and the brightest» has brought the families increased wealth through financial transfers, but it has weakened the clans' ability to intervene effectively with the authorities. Traditionally, families relied on the services of a mukhtar, who, from the day of the Ottoman Empire, usually was appointed by the authorities in

consultation with the family. He was paid a small sum, but made much of his money acting as the intermediary between the family and the authorities and as the authorized signatory on many legal documents. The entire system was based on a clearly defined pattern of deference, though the mukhtar invariably would take counsel from other family members before petitioning the authorities. Because of emigration the mukhtars have fewer young adults to call upon for suggestions and are receiving less input about the concerns of the younger generations. Many are simply out of touch.

Moreover, the Israelis, while trying to maintain the mukhtar system as a convenient method of political control, inadvertently undermined it. The increasing institutionalization of the Israeli administration in the occupied territories meant that the younger, literate Palestinians no longer needed or wanted many of the services the mukhtars once provided. For example, with the advent of Israeli government-run labor exchanges, the need for family connections in finding work became far less important. Indeed, the mukhtars proved to be singularly ineffective in dealing with one of the most painful issues on the families' agendas — reuniting families. Israel rigidly controls the number of Palestinians allowed to resettle in the occupied territories after living abroad for a long period. Some fled during the Six-Day War. Others left for study or jobs. Those who remain abroad for more than 7 years have their residence permits canceled. This rule was used by Israeli authorities in deporting the political activist Mubarak Awad in June 1988. The Israelis said that by having once stayed abroad for 13 years he was no longer a resident of Jerusalem.

From 1967 to 1972 the Israelis allowed about 45,000 Palestinians to return under the family reunion scheme. Since that time, however, the number of permits issued annually has dropped dramatically. Israeli civil authorities, because of their obsessive concern for their image, refuse to divulge the current figures, but Palestinians say that the number of permits issued now does not amount to more than a few hundred a year. One Israeli source, former Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Meron benvenisti's *The West Bank Handbook : A Political Lexicon* (1986), says that by 1985 the number of permits issued dropped to no more than a few dozen.

An estimated 150.000 petitions to the Israeli authorities have been pending for years, according to the army. However, Israeli usually issues permits only as gestures or rewards to families or notables who have ben particularly cooperative with the Israeli Civil Administration. In effect, then, those traditional leaders who were effective in securing

permits were denigrated in the eyes of young Palestinians, further weakening the old family system.

The PLO also played a formidable role inbreaking up the traiditional pattern of deference. It viewed the old leadership as largely reactionary, corrupt, and oriented toward maintaining the status quo. The PLO built on and vastly expanded the existing organizational structure in the occupied territories in the 1970s. Ironically, the form closely resembled the one used by the Zionists prior to the founding of the state of Israel. In essence this revamped network of charitable and public service institutions — from day care centers to labor unions to school — provided an alternative social services network to the one controlled by the Israelis and the traditional Arab leadership. Every Palestinian would have to come in contact with one of these organizations at least once a year, the thinking went, thus providing contacts and a measure of political control through people's dependency on them. The idea has worked, and it is to these instituions, not to their elders, that many young Palestinians now turn for assistance and guidance.

But the PLO's expatriate leadership was also careful to ensure that these organizations would not become bases for the development of an independent, indigenous leadership that might challenge its control over the Palestinian movement. Using intimidation, threats, and occasional violence, the expatriates made sure that those in positions of organizational influence continued to defer at all times to the PLO leadership abroad. The Israelis, who rarely paid more than lip service to the idea of a strong local Palestinian leadership, abetted the PLO's policy through detentions, arrests, and explusions. Thus when the *intifada* broke out, there were no recognized leaders. Organization was fragmented into small neighborhood committees that had little coordination among themselves except for some street actions like the general strikes. Therefore, the Palestinian youngsters, for all their bravery and sacrifice, were unable to capitalize politically on the publicity the demonstrations generated worldwide.

A Time for Reassessment

Among Palestinian activists the euphoria that accompanied the first months of demonstrations has waned. The cost in human lives has been high : More than 200 Palestinians and 3 Israelis had been killed in the uprising as of August 1988. A measure of fatigue has also set in. The Israelis, using both military and administrative means, have been able

to suppress many of the outward expressions of the rebellion. But it seems highly unlikely that the revolt will bé squelched completely because none of its root causes are being addressed.

For Palestinians it is now a time for introspection and assessment of the experience. Basic concepts that were once elevated to the level of political dogma are being questioned. For instance, the israelis correctly predicted that the wage-earning refugees have a very small financial cushion and thus cannot tolerate long periods away from work without considerable hardship. So even though Palestinian workers are essential to certain key areas of the Israeli economy, such as constructuion, textiles, and municipal services like garbage collection, they have not been able to stay away from their jobs long enough to have had a significant impact. This has led some Palestinians to question an established belief that for nationalistic reasons the resettlement of refugees should not be undertaken until the entire Palestinian issue has been resolved. Now these Palestinians are saying that because the refugees in the occupied areas have not been fully rehabilitated or provided with a solid financial base, the Palestinian capacity to carry on a long struggle for self-determination has been weakened. Therefore, for nationalistic reasons, the refugees' plight ought to be solved quickly. As Awartami said in an interview : «The old beliefs might have been proper for their time, but we have to rethink everything now in light of the *intifada*. What was once thought of as betrayal (resettlement of the refugees) is no longer betrayal. (The refugees') economic base couldn't withstand even a week of *intifada*. If Israel, for example, partially obstructs the flow to Israel for work, it will be a disaster».

Another question, which borders on outright heresy, is whether advanced education has undermined the whole Palestinian nationalist movement. Awartami claims that «educated Palestinians are a scar on the Palestinian people. Education is an infectious disease and the homeland was the victim. A college degree is a visa for emigration. It allows people to leave without a hint that they are doing anything wrong».

Thus a lack of violence in the occupied territories in the future will mean not that the social revolution is losing steam, but rather that the rebels have turned their focus to strategic instead of tactical issues. As one leading Palestinian, Bir Zeit University Président Gabi Baramki, puts it, «The *intifada* has raised enough issues to give us 20 years of work.»

As with any upheaval whose direction and results are unclear, the

intifada presents all those involved with both risks and opportunities. The basic risk is that if the issues underlying the uprising are not addressed, the Palestinians will become increasingly embittered and even more violent than before. The basic opportunity lies in opening un contacts with the new generation of West Bank and Gaza leaders at a time in their lives when their political thought processes and direction are not yet fully formed.

If the various parties involved can agree on only one thing, it is the necessity of a political resolution of the Palestinian problem. The disagreements come over how the process should begin and what the outcome should be. Five major scenarios have been presented thus far. All appear to be heading for a dead end.

By far the best known is the so-called Jordanian option, which is backed by US Secretary of State George Shultz and israeli Foreign Minister and Labor party leader Shimon Peres. A negotiating process would begin with an international conference attended by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. After a formal opening session, the Israelis and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delagation would break off for direct bilateral talks The concept has been rejected by both the PLO and Israeli Prime Minister and Likud bloc Leader Yitzhak Shamir. The Soviet Union, while agreeing to the idea in principle, wants the permanent Security Council members to be able to intervene directly in the talks. Both the United States and Peres reject that idea.

The second proposal, favored by Shamir, is to renew the talks on limited self-rule for the Palestinians in the occupied territories, an approach called for in the Camp David peace accords. But the autonomy plan is viewed by all but the Likud as an idea whose time has passed. The Palestinians, in particul, seriously doubt Shamir's sincerity and his willigness to bargain in good faith. They fear that an autonomy scheme would only create a new status quo that would block their drive for political self-determination.

The third proposal, supported by many of the conservative, traditional West Bank leaders, features direct Israeli-Syrian negotiations. If Israel began to negotiate with Syria, they reason, Jordan would feel freer to enter into talks with Israel - even withoutthe PLO. This scenario would force the PLO to take a more pragmatic and conciliatory stance. At the moment, however, this proposal appears to be little more than wishful thinking. Neither Israel nor Syria has demonstrated an interest in providing the kinds of concessions that would allow negotiations to take place.

The fourth scenario, favored by the PLO and most of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, calls for direct Israeli-PLO talks. But the PLO, at least at the very highest levels, so far has shown no inclination to accept specifically UN resolutions 242 and 338, which advance the formula of land for Peace, and to renounce terrorism. These are the minimum terms that both Israeli doves and the United States have set for starting a formal dialogue with the PLO.

The fifth option already has been implemented by Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and, to a certain extent, by American diplomats. They are trying to re-establish their contacts with the traditional leadership and to present that leadership as a legitimate conduit for political discourse. But most of this leadership has been discredited and can no longer boast a viable constituency. There are a few notable exceptions, like Faisal Husseini, the director of the Arab Studies Center in East Jerusalem. Still, the Israeli government will not talk to these leaders because it is convinced that they are running the PLO's operations in the occupied territories. Husseini, for example, was placed under administrative detention on July 31, 1988, and his study center ordered closed for a year.

There is an underlying futility to each of these palliatives because they neither call for contact with the new generation of leaders in the occupied territories nor address the issues that led to the *intifada* in the first place. the rationale for each of these options is understandable. Each is designed to serve the intersts of the party that presented it, and each is based on a desire to reclaim the influence each exercised prior to the *intifada.* None takes account of the social revolution that is under way.

What is needed now is a total re-examination of the issues involved and a rethinking of basic attitudes and beliefs by all of the parties. That should lead to an commitment to seek out the new leaders and draw them into the decision-making process. The policy adopted by the Israelis so far has been the very opposite. Those who demonstrate leadership qualities are quickly arrested and detained. The opposition to bringing the young Palestinians into the political arena is not confined to the Israelis, however.

The old leaders of each of the parties to the dispute are known quantities. Dealing with the established leaders requires no change in existing policies. What is more, there is always a fear of dealing with the unknown. No prestige is to be gained by talking to youngsters in rough clothing. The young Palestinians are less restrained in venting

their spleen and hurling insults. In both the PLO and the occupied territories, those Palestinins between ages 15 and 30 who run the *intifada* are viewed basically as a threat to the established political power patterns. Outsiders are also reluctant to be associated with the ugly side of the uprising — the store burnings, the settling of old scores among Palestinians, and the use of enforcer squads that ensure that merchants obey instructions to close their doors. But possibly the main reason the new leaders are being ignored is that neither the Israelis nor foreign governments want to make the sort of long-term commitment that bringing them into the political process would entail. Making contacts, building up trust, and maintaining lines fo communication require the kind of persistent legwork in the field that bureaucrats and diplomats disdain. Work of this sort does not look outstanding on career résumés.

Yet there appears to be no alternative to starting this process — and it should be started as soon as possible. The channels are still open. With the breakdown of the traditional hierarchy in the occupied territories, authority has devolved to neighborhood action committees — one of the most rudimentary forms of political organization. Even the PLO has been unable to coodinate the activities of these small, semiautonomous groups. PLO-inspired leaflets may provide general guidance on when to strike and which action to take, but the specifics have to be left to each neighborhood committee. In the West Bank city of Nablus, for example, at least 19 such committees are believed to be operating.

These committees have become laboratories for political experimentation and practice where young Palestinians learn public administration at its most elementary level, gain experience in consensus making, and reinvent the political wheel. They already have had several notable successes in self-government. When the Palestinians in the Israeli-run police force resigned en masse in March 1988, several of the committees established their own security patrols. In some villages the committees have taken on the job of municipal sanitation and maintaining pulic areas. The Israeli army, in its drive to reassert its authority, has begun a systematic campaign to uproot and destroy the committees and to halt their independent work. The problem with this tactic for the Israelis is that because the committees are such a basic form of political organization, new leaders arise as soon as one group has been arrested. If the Palestinians have demonstrated but one thing throughout the uprising, it is their determination to continue it in some form at almost any cost. Otherwise, they fear, all of the deaths and injuries will have been in vain.

What is needed now is a commitment to dialogue and an openness that have been sadly lacking. The central message of the *intifada* to the outside world is that young Palestinians want to be heard. What they have to say now may be incoherent — a jumbled litany of dogma, slogans, and wild demands. But therein lies the challenge — to influence their ideas before their thought patterns are fixed. To encourage such a dialogue, there must be from all parties a restructuring of priorities, a willingness to provide resources, and a desire to examine the issues in depth.

In the case of the United States, one step would be to establish a permanent position within the consulate general in Jerusalem to be responsible for developing and maintaining contacts with the new generation of Palestinian leaders. In the initial stages such an effort might require creating a team to go into the field and make the necessary contacts. But the United States also must be willing to re-examine old and cherished policies. For example, as part of his effort to improve the quality of life in the occupied territories, Shultz pressured the Israelis in to allowing the Arab-owned Cairo-Amman Bank to reopen. It was hoped that this bank would then provide seed money for industrial entrepreneurs. In the year and a half since the bank reopened, however, almost all of its loans have been directed at financing commercial transactions, where a good deal of money can be made quickly. Almost none of them have been directed toward development.

In the case of Israel, nothing less than a revolution in thinking and bureaucratic procedures will be required. To date Israel has concentrated on re-establishing its authority and protecting its image abroad. No proper machanism exists for listening to those engaged in the *intifada.* The Isrealis talk only to the old Palestinian leadership. Developing a corps of «ears» not affiliated with the domestic intelligence apparatus would require making service in the army or civil administration in the occupied areas a high priority, not to mention an important career track for the brightest officers. Today, long-term service in the Civil Administration in the occupied areas is considered a deathblow to an army career. Officers are promoted to general after serving in fighting units, not for competent work with alien civilians. Thus over time the body of officers that has developed within the Civil Administration has been notable only for its mediocrity of thought, its insensitivity to social issues, and its unwillingness to make more than formal contact with the local Palestinian population.

To be sure, forging contacts with the young Palestinian adults, lifting some of the more demeaning controls, and refraining from arresting potential leaders will not bring about immediate and striking results. But the actions can lay the groundwork for future dialogue and can help to identify and ameliorate some of the worst social problems. A demonstrated commitment to dialogue and action must come before genuine political discussions. It eases tensions and provides discussions. It eases tensions and provides time for an in-depth appraisal of position.

The Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza have shown in the past that when they develop a consensus on an issue they can affect the policies of the PLO. Today a new consensus is being formed. New leaders and new patterns of deference are emerging, particularly in the neighborhood committees. If the United States and Israel want to influence the young leaders and the consensus they are building, and if they want to prod Palestinian political thinking in the direction of pragmatism, now is the time to begin listening and to use the information and experience acquired to develop policy options that respond to the yound Palestinians' needs and aspirations. The alternative for the Palestinians is an existence of fewer opportunities, more hate, and more violence.

An error was introduced during the editorial preparation of a letter to the editor by Michael A. Ledeen in the Summer 1988 issue. Attorney Arthur Liman's position was incorrectly identified. He was the chief counsel to the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition. FOREIGN POLICY regrets the error.

منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية

الإعلام الموحد

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